



Committee: Finance
Testimony on: SB616 - “Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards -- Eligible Sources-Waste to Energy-Derived Sources”
Organization: Takoma Park Mobilization Environment Committee
Person
Submitting: Diana Younts, co-chair
Position: Favorable
Hearing Date: March 15, 2022

Dear M. Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing our testimony today in support of SB616. MLC’s Climate Justice Wing is a statewide coalition of over 50 grassroots and grasstops organizations focused on getting State level climate justice legislation passed. Each bill for which we advocate is evaluated through an equity lens, with a particular focus on how disadvantaged communities are affected by the bill and the bill’s climate impact.

We urge you to support the proposed bill to remove incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) for three reasons: 1) burning trash is displacing clean energy in the RPS; 2) burning trash is not clean; and 3) burning trash is not healthy.

As Speaker Adrienne Jones said last year, “climate change is an existential threat” and removing [dirty energy] from the RPS is an “important first step” in addressing it. Energy from incinerators emits almost five times the greenhouse gases than energy created by black liquor (which the legislature removed from the RPS in 2021). [See Department of Natural Resources Final RPS Report 2019, Table 2-8](#). And indeed, as discussed more fully below, incineration is more polluting than coal. So, it is important that incineration be removed from the RPS and that it not be allowed to be subsidized or to displace clean energy.

Incineration is Displacing Clean Energy. A shockingly large and *growing* percentage of Maryland’s renewable “clean energy” comes from high-polluting energy sources. Maryland’s percentage of energy from dirty sources in the tier 1 RPS *grew from 33% in 2018 to 40% in 2019*. In 2019 alone, Maryland paid over \$32 million to buy renewable energy credits from dirty energy sources, a fact that is particularly

surprising in light of the fact that both Covanta and Wheelabrator are headquartered out of state. See Report [here](#).

Montgomery County, where one of Maryland's incinerators is located, supports removing incineration from the RPS and is actively moving towards requiring composting (organic waste is fully 51% of what is in the waste stream). As to Baltimore, the community most affected by the unhealthy air created by the Wheelabrator incinerator – South Baltimore – has been fighting for its closure for years. As far as other interests in Baltimore who support the Wheelabrator incinerator, one has to ask: Why should all of Maryland be forced to pay for Baltimore's solid waste issues when it is being done at the cost of healthy lives for the children and parents in the surrounding community? It is time we stop closing our eyes to this problem.

Burning Trash is *Dirtier* Than Coal. Burning trash is not clean energy: to produce the same amount of energy, trash incinerators emit more greenhouse gases than coal plants do. Trash incinerators are the dirtiest way to make electricity by most air pollution measures. Even with air pollution control equipment in place, trash incinerators emit more pollution than (largely uncontrolled) coal power plants per unit of energy produced.

To produce the same amount of energy as coal power plants in Maryland, the Montgomery County incinerator -- operated by Covanta -- releases 15% more fine particulate matter, 60% more arsenic, 68% more greenhouse gasses, and 94% more nitrogen oxide (which triggers asthma), 3.5 times the amount of chromium, 11 times more lead, 21 times more cadmium, 26 times more mercury, and 50 times more hydrochloric acid than a coal plant. Incinerators release 3.1 times the amount of mercury as landfills. The Wheelabrator incinerator in Baltimore is similarly polluting.

Incinerators Are Not Healthy: Health data studied in Baltimore strongly supports that incinerators sicken Marylanders. In December 2017, the Abell Foundation, in conjunction with the Environmental Integrity Project, published a study entitled "Asthma and Air Pollution in Baltimore City." The study found that Baltimore's asthma rate is three times greater than the rest of Maryland and that the highest incidence of asthma occurred in those zip codes that are adjacent to major emitters of air pollution: 21230, in which the Wheelabrator incinerator is located, and 21226, in which has other major facilities are located. Similarly, the Dickerson trash incinerator is the single largest industrial emitter of air pollutants in Montgomery County. This facility produces approximately 740 tons of air pollutants and sends 180,000 tons of toxic ash to landfills in Virginia.

Trash incineration and other dirty energy in the RPS contributes to air pollution that harms Marylanders' health and all Maryland ratepayers subsidize that pollution to the tune of \$32 million per year. Marylanders should not have to pay that price.

For these reasons, we urge you to support SB616 and remove incineration from the Renewable Portfolio Standards.